 said preweakening at said particular location, said preweakening comprising a groove extending in said pattern, but without completely penetrating the outer layer of the said trim piece, said groove having a substantially regularly varying depth bottom portion lying along said predetermined pattern cut into said cover by a cyclically varying intensity laser beam.

25. (AMENDED) The trim piece according to claim 24 wherein said substantially regularly varying depth groove portion forms partial perforations in an inside surface of said outer layer.

REMARKS

Claims 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 9-14, 24 & 25 remain in the application.

The courtesy extended in the interview conducted on September 26, 2002 is gratefully acknowledged.

The proposed amendments were discussed to distinguish over Nanbu et al. Specifically, the "uniformly" or "regularly" stepped depth scoring conducted by a cyclically varying intensity laser beam is not suggested by Nanbu et al. who designedly incorporates a changing length stepped depth configuration in order to produce a varying strength of the trim piece material, which is intended in order to have the weakest zones at the center of the pattern, and progressively stronger zones farther away. This causes the tearing to begin at the center of the pattern.

The term "regularly" has been adopted by the Applicant as the most apt adjective.

While some slight variations in the stepped depth will occur due to incidental process variations, these are not by design, and the stepped depth configuration is thus substantially regular. In claims 1 and 24, this regularly stepped scoring shown in Figure 18 is claimed without the intended variations described in Nanbu et al. Nanbu et al. also molds in the zones of weakening, which affects the tearing strength of the material, it is believed, by reorienting the long molecules to toughen the material to an unpredictable extent.

The regularly stepped depth created by a pulsating laser beam in production has been found to function well to produce good quality parts as it is easier to obtain the proper tearing strength without overweakening the material to the point where cracking or "witness" lines can be seen from within the passenger compartment as can happen with a straight groove.

The specification has been amended to provide antecedent basis for the term "regularly" now used in claims 1 and 24 which merely describes what is shown in Figure 18, and does not constitute new matter.

Since agreement was reached at the aforementioned interview that these differences are patentable over Nanbu et al. and since no further search is necessitated, it is felt that entry of the Amendment and allowance of the application is proper.

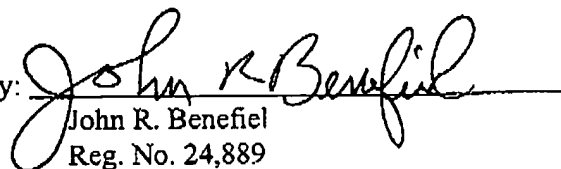
Attached hereto is a marked-up version of the changes made to the specification and claims by the current amendment. The attached page is captioned "Version with markings to show changes made".

Favorable consideration is respectfully requested.

Respectfully submitted,

Date: October 4, 2002

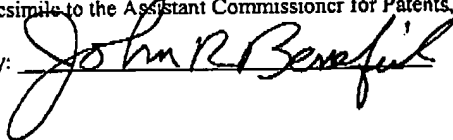
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CERTIFICATE OF FACSIMILE UNDER 37 CFR 1.8(a)

It is hereby certified that this correspondence, along with any items referred to as being attached or enclosed, is being sent via facsimile to the Assistant Commissioner for Patents, Washington, D.C. 20231, on October 4, 2002.

By:



VERSION WITH MARKINGS TO SHOW CHANGES MADE

IN THE SPECIFICATION:

Please replace the paragraph beginning at page 17, line 1 with the following rewritten paragraph:

--Figure 18 shows a substantially regularly stepped, variable depth groove 130 formed in a cover 132 which varies in depth along its length. This shape may be produced by pulsating operation of the laser generator, resulting in a cyclically varying intensity laser beam.--

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend claim 1 as follows:

1. (AMENDED) An automotive interior trim piece adapted to cover an air bag installation when said trim piece is installed in an automotive vehicle, said trim piece preweakened along a predetermined pattern so as to enable formation of an air bag deployment opening in said trim piece by pressure exerted by an air bag deploying from an inner side of said trim piece, said trim piece having an inner surface and an outer surface, said outer surface visible when said trim piece is installed in an automotive vehicle, said outer surface extending smoothly and uninterruptedly across said preweakening pattern, said preweakening comprising a scoring penetrating into said inner surface and extending along said predetermined pattern, said scoring having a substantially regularly stepped depth configuration along said predetermined pattern but not completely penetrating through to said outer surface; said stepped depth configuration cut into said cover by a cyclically varying [in depth] intensity laser beam.

Please amend claims 24 and 25 as follows:

24. (AMENDED) A preweakened automotive interior trim piece for covering an air bag installation for an automotive vehicle, said preweakening extending in a predetermined pattern enabling formation of an air bag deployment opening in said trim piece by pressure exerted by deployment of said air bag mounted on the inside of said trim piece at a particular location, said trim piece having a plurality of layers including an outer layer and an inner layer, said outer layer having an outer visible surface extending smoothly and uninterruptedly across said preweakening at said particular location, said preweakening comprising a groove extending in said pattern, but without completely penetrating the outer layer of the said trim piece, said groove having a [cyclically] substantially regularly varying depth bottom portion lying along said predetermined pattern cut into said cover by a cyclically varying intensity laser beam.

25. (AMENDED) The trim piece according to claim 24 wherein said [cyclically] substantially regularly varying depth groove portion forms partial perforations in an inside surface of said outer layer.